

Ziona's 4 story house in Baktawng village where he lives with 181 members of his family, Oct. 6, 2011. (Adnan Abidi/Reuters) [#](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2011/11/world_population_where_its_thi.html#photo31)

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As I was looking at pictures on the Big Picture site, I found several I liked under the title, “World Population.” This particular picture caught my eye. One would think, looking at this picture, that this housing unit is an apartment building of some type, when in actuality it is the residence of one man. Yes, it is the residence of one man, his thirty-nine wives, his ninety-four children, and his thirty-three grandchildren. I am amazed, impressed, and appalled at the same time.

I am amazed because I cannot believe that so many “related” people could live together in harmony in such close quarters. I emphasize “related” because I believe there are places, apartment houses, or hotels that could, and do house at least one hundred and sixty-six individuals, but not people who are all connected by blood. This is amazing. The largest family gatherings I can relate to are those at Thanksgiving and Christmas time; I am not sure living with that many relatives would be a comfortable experience for me. A man’s whole family coexists in this one dwelling.

I am impressed because I would think it would be difficult to maintain my sanity if I were living with that many people. Some of the other pictures that were included in this set showed the women dividing up such chores as cooking, laundry, and watching the children. The pictures also showed how the children played together in a space that was provided on the roof, or top floor. All of the “family” appeared to be getting along, making the situation, and living arrangements work to form a comfortable, well-organized living environment. This lifestyle and living arrangement were impressive, but appalling to me in relationship to my personal values.

I operate under a more conservative set of values. I believe a man should only have one wife at a time. I think most people in the western hemisphere share that same idea, or believe it to be an important, moral concept. In America, it is against the law to have more than one wife at a time; it is called bigamy if a man has more. There are, however, some cultures/religions that consider this practice acceptable. The Asian gentleman who is the husband/father of this large family falls into that category. American women are not usually willing to share their mate with another woman, let alone thirty-eight others. It is more common in this day and age for children from different unions to live with one another; children are flexible little creatures, and will adapt to situations more easily than most grown-ups. If that living arrangement has been their only experience, it will probably not present a problem; they will accept it as a matter of fact. The idea of numerous wives living together I find disturbing on several levels.

All things considered, they say “life is stranger than fiction.” When looking at this picture, I would be inclined to agree. I am not a judgmental person, so even though it would not be the ideal environment or lifestyle for me, I do not condemn those to whom it is a way of life. I am still amazed, impressed, and appalled, but to quote the French, “c’est la viv.” That translates to “such is life.”